



# S. Mtn. Freeway alternatives offered

## Critics hope to save houses, mountain

**Kerry Fehr-Snyder**

The Arizona Republic

Mar. 14, 2007 12:00 AM

Critics of the proposed South Mountain Freeway want planners to rethink alternative routes, including creation of a truck bypass on the western edge of Arizona to eliminate the need to cut through Ahwatukee Foothills.

An attorney for the grass-roots Protecting Arizona's Resources and Children, or PARC, spoke Thursday night at the annual meeting of the Club West homeowners association.

Howard Shanker recommended a north/south freeway along the Arizona 95 highway route from Yuma to connect Interstate 8 and Interstate 10.

"That might actually be a shortcut for the trucks" driving to and from southern Arizona/Mexico to California, said Shanker, a Tempe-based environmental attorney PARC hired to fight the current Pecos Road route.

"It wouldn't require as much work. It wouldn't require as much money," he said.

Shanker also suggested a north/south freeway to be built along the Arizona 85 route that connects I-10 to I-8 at Gila Bend.

The alternative route, also known as the CANAMEX route, would allow for truck traffic between Canada and Mexico without the adverse environmental, community and social impact, he said.

"They don't have to blast South Mountain that way," Shanker said in a phone interview Tuesday.

Unlike Ahwatukee, there would be no schools along that route, said Shanker, fresh off a victory in federal appeals court to block the Snow Bowl near Flagstaff from using reclaimed water to make artificial snow on the San Francisco Peaks.

The current route being studied by the Arizona Department of Transportation would link I-10 to 55th Avenue by building a 10-lane freeway along Pecos Road in Ahwatukee Foothills and making a cavern-like cut through South Mountain Park.

The problem with any of the alternative plans would be in paying for it, an ADOT spokesman said.

Other Arizona counties would have to pitch in to build what is now estimated as a \$1.7 billion, 22-mile freeway that already has secured funding and is solely under the control of Maricopa County.

"The difficulty is that some of that would fall within two counties," ADOT spokesman Tim Tait said of other routes.

ADOT is studying the environmental impacts of the proposed Pecos Road route and expects to release a federally mandated draft environmental impact statement later this year.

After ADOT, in conjunction with the Federal Highway Administration, decides whether to build the freeway, the Maricopa Association of Governments will vote on whether to fund the project using a half-cent sales tax approved by voters in 2004 as a way to build Loop 202 around the Valley.

"It's not at all a done deal," Tait said.

But, he added, "Transportation is a problem in the Valley," and with the population estimated to double to 6.2 million residents by 2030, from 3.1 million in 2000, traffic is expected to only get worse.

"ADOT currently is evaluating commuter and heavy rail from Phoenix to Tucson," Tait said.

That likely would require more taxpayer money and backing from federal and state agencies.

"There is no magic bullet, no magic solution," he said. "It's rail, buses, freeways, arterial street improvements."

Transportation planners estimate the proposed South Mountain Freeway would carry 189,000 vehicles per day by 2030. It also would reduce the so-called "time tax" on commuters who sit in traffic, draining about \$400 million a year in worker productivity, Tait said.

When the freeway was originally proposed in 1985, ADOT began studying 30 alternative routes for it. That has been whittled down to one: Pecos Road.

Meanwhile, Ahwatukee Foothills has grown to 88,000 residents from about 20,000 residents 15 years ago.

Tait was asked by one resident who exactly owns South Mountain Park - it's owned by Phoenix - and whether ADOT plans to use its eminent domain powers to condemn part of the preserve to cut freeway lanes through it.

"South Mountain Park is a concern," Tait said. "I think it's a concern for all of us."

Another resident also asked Tait what it would take to stop the project.

"I will tell you that MAG is planning the project . . . and ADOT takes direction from MAG," he said.

A MAG representative did not attend the homeowners association meeting.

### What do you think?

Post a comment about this article

• [My Accounts Settings](#) • [Log Out](#)

Your Name: Joy215

Preview

Post

### Your comments

With public officials (Phoenix Mayor Gordon as the latest example) who gives away \$100 million in taxpayers money after condemning the same practice from other cities, how can you expect our public officials to EVER do anything that benefits the public?

You can't. Every public official has an agenda and is an expert at twisting the facts to his or her benefit. Public officials reap the benefits of their "deals" with big business and land developers after their terms are up; in the private sector. And after they have screwed the public out of as much tax money as possible.

Our sales tax currently runs near 10% because all these "public officials" give away our sales and property tax money to land developers and big business because the general public is so APATHETIC and continues to allow them to do this.

Then to add insult to this mess, we have to pay \$15 billion dollars for all these stupid freeways that will in the end not solve our transportation problems.

Politicians and developers create the problems, then let Arizonans pay for it. This state is full of sheep.  
(Sam1222, March 14, 2007 06:41AM)